2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 A W32 Gond A W32
Muria

THE PROBLEM OF GHOTUL INFERTILITY

see that the root of the creeper has no side-shoots, for these impair its efficacy.

Another orally administered drug is supposed to confer permanent sterilization.

'On a Sunday pick a few pieces of a parasite growing on a tilai tree. Dry them and heat in the fire till they can be powdered easily. Make into small pills with gur and give them to the woman—without her knowing—to eat with parched rice.' This is sometimes given by a chelik to his motiari. 'When there is great love between a boy and girl, he gives it to her so that they can love one another without danger.'

I do not know how commonly these remedies are used, but there is no doubt that chelik and motiari are expected to avoid conception somehow. A pregnancy is regarded as a gross piece of carelessness. There is a general belief that no one need conceive unless they want to, that a definite psychological factor is involved. If a boy and girl do not give themselves to one another with too oblivious a passion, if they hold back a little, if they are careful not to love too constantly or too long, conception need never follow. We have seen that too much love is not approved in the ghotul; conception is the punishment of an over-passionate attachment.

But when all precautions fail, and a girl finds herself pregnant, what happens? Directly she finds that 'the moon has come again, but the stream of blood is dry', she tells her chelik. There is no difficulty in the old type of ghotul; her ghotul-husband will look after her. In the newer type, where during the course of the month the girl may have been sleeping with a dozen different boys, she chooses either the one she likes best or the one with whom she first had congress after her last period. His immediate duty is to bring abortifacients.

Abortions are probably fairly common. In one village I was told that they mixed gur, ashes and the strongest mahua spirit available and gave it to the girl to drink. In another place the Muria said that they used gunpowder [1] mixed with mahua spirit. In Kokori, the Gaita recommended the obviously magical remedy of taking a bit of bark from a mahua tree which had been struck by lightning. This was burnt and the ashes mixed with liquor. In Berma, an eighty-year-old Muria recalled how when he was Nengi of the ghotul he made the Nirosa pregnant. He first dosed her with *keksa* root, but without success, apparently because he did not know the correct ritual of obtaining it, and then on a Monday he bought a bottle of *phuli* liquor. 'On that day we both fasted and in the evening, after bathing, I offered an egg and some liquor to Lingo Pen saying, "O Mahapurub Lingo, if you are a true god, let this girl abort: if you don't, the sin is yours and not mine. You founded the ghotul and if you truly live there till this day, show proof of it and I will offer you another egg". I then made the girl drink the rest of the liquor and in her drunkenness she aborted. As I had promised I gave the second egg to Lingo Pen.'

In one ghotul, about which I believe I have entirely authentic information, six of the girls had procured abortions; one had achieved it three times, twice in the third month and once in the fourth; another girl had achieved it twice. But the motiari do not like using abortifacients, for they believe that they lead to sterility later on, and this ghotul was probably exceptional. There

[1] Himes (op. cit., p. 8) quotes an unpublished report by W. B. Cline that 'it is the custom among the natives of the Oasis of Siwa in the Lybian Desert to drink infusions of gunpowder' as a contraceptive measure.

X 883 ● 847 were a number of older girls there; in other places, where only a few motiari exceed three years from the menarche, such large-scale abortifacient practices appear to be unnecessary. In any case the practice is not approved by the elders of the tribe. In Hathipakna, the Malko was made pregnant by the Jamadar, both being of the same clan. An older man tried to procure an abortion, but failed; the matter became known and he was fined five rupees by the clan panchayat.

X 883 848 If all their efforts fail, the chelik and motiari report the matter to the ghotul leaders, who keep it dark as long as possible. There is no greater ghotul crime than to reveal such a secret in the village.

In the meantime the girl may elope with the same or another lover, and get married quietly elsewhere. If the marriage season is at hand, it is not uncommon for the parents to hurry on the marriage with the girl's original betrothed, and for no one to say anything about it. When this happens it is whispered that 'the girl has a baby in her *haldi-dhoti*', that is, while she is still wearing the clothes stained with the marriage oil.

If neither of these solutions are possible, the headman and elders of the village hold a panchayat in the ghotul, at which all the chelik and motiari must be present. The headman says, 'By whose hand is this? Whose is this belly?' The girl says nothing but goes to the boy responsible and takes him by the hand. If the parents of her betrothed are present, the headman says, 'Look, your goods are damaged; do you still want them or no?' He turns to the girl and says, referring to her betrothed, 'Do you still want this boy or no?'

One of two things thus can happen. If the girl's betrothed is willing to have her, and she has no objection, the marriage is performed as soon as possible. The chelik who caused the pregnancy has to pay some compensation to the husband as well as a fine to the panchayat. This happens more commonly than one would expect; if a girl is pregnant, even by another boy, it is at least a proof that she will not be barren. Out of the 80 pregnancies to which I have referred already, in only 26 cases did the girl marry her lover; in the other 54 cases she married her betrothed.

Where the girl refuses to marry her betrothed or he decides that he does not want her, as happened in the 26 cases, she declares in the panchayat. 'This boy has given me this belly. I will go with him and never leave him.' When she says this, her parents abuse her, for it will mean financial loss to them, and the elders give everyone a lecture, pointing out that such things never happened in their day and that with a little care all such scandals could be avoided. When the Kotwar of Atpal made a girl pregnant, the elders fined him and reproved him with the words, 'When a mare has an itch for it, she allows the horse to mount her, but she knows she cannot stop the seed from entering her. You too knew it, so why were you not careful?'

A long discussion, generally entirely financial, follows. Fines are imposed and compensation decided. The village elders demand their share. The marriage is arranged as soon as possible.

In either case, the child is accepted by its real or legal father, and the origin of its birth is soon forgotten. It carries little stigma, and once the financial side of the incident is settled, little more is said. For the disgrace and danger of a pregnancy is not a moral one. A pregnancy is dreaded because everyone makes a fuss, the routine of daily life is upset, the matrimonial arrangements so carefully devised to unite families and repay old debts are disturbed, there is a general feeling that someone has blundered. The chelik and motiari are embarrassed, but they are not ashamed.

308